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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000064

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [KJUS](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: HONDURAS CATCHES PLANE LADEN WITH COCAINE IN
SUCCESSFUL JOINT OPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (C) Summary. Honduran armed forces and law enforcement personnel captured a Venezuelan-registered airplane bearing over 1500 kilograms of suspected cocaine and two go-fast boats in a USG supported joint Honduran operation in the early hours of January 28. The operation demonstrated the ability of GOH forces, both military and police, to respond rapidly and coordinate efforts with U.S. drug interdiction personnel. End summary.

12. (C) On January 28, members of the Honduran National Police (HNP) assigned to the island of Utila in the Caribbean responded to an alert by the Tegucigalpa County Office Vetted Unit (TCO VU), the Mission counterpart interdiction unit within the HNP that a suspicious aircraft was attempting to land on Utila. At 01:15 local, a group of approximately five HNP responded to the Utila airport and encountered an aircraft being offloaded by approximately 15 armed personnel. The HNP unit proceeded to investigate further and a firefight ensued between the suspects and the HNP. The suspects fled the scene, abandoning the plane, two go-fast boats and packages containing suspected cocaine. HNP requested backup as gunfire continued from the surrounding bush. Honduran Navy reinforcements arrived at approximately 04:30 local, enabling the HNP to secure the area. No arrests were made at the time, as the HNP were outnumbered and out-gunned. After further inspection, over 1500 kilograms of suspected cocaine were recovered from the scene, as well as the airplane and two go-fast boats.

13. (C) The aircraft in question had been tracked by Joint Interagency Task Force - South (JIATF-S), who alerted TAT Tegucigalpa. Based on intel received regarding the aircraft, interdiction assets had been dispatched to Guatemala to await arrival of the craft there. Through constant updates relayed from JIATF-S via the TAT office as the aircraft approached the region, TCO, DEA and Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-B)), as well as interagency personnel in Guatemala and Mexico were able to coordinate and redirect efforts as the aircraft diverted from its originally-suspected course. Once the aircraft's course was understood to be the vicinity of Utila in the Bay Islands of Honduras, DEA and TCO concurred that intercept assets would not be able to reach the site in time, and they coordinated with HNP and HOAF to intercept. This constant, coordinated effort led to the largest successful seizure of an air shipment of cocaine into Honduras in over a year and demonstrated the local HNP willingness to take on a better-armed trafficking suspect, as well as their ability to prevail in their efforts. Given the limited HNP assets

stationed on the small island of Utila, the seizure can be marked as a major success for the HNP and for the joint-interagency interdiction effort in Honduras and the region.

LLORENS